

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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INFO AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

RUESLS / AMEMBASSY LAGOS 052

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT SF NZ

SUBJ: REACTION TO FORCED POSTPONEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY
TOUR OF NEW ZEALAND

1. NEW ZEALAND PRIME MINISTER KIRK' S DECISION FORCING
POSTPONEMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY TEAM' S TOUR OF
NEW ZEALAND HAS RECEIVED EXTENSIVE AND PROMINENT
COVERAGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN NEWSPAPERS. FOR EXAMPLE ,
FIRST THREE PAGES OF APRIL 11 DIE BURGER CONTAIN ONLY
TWO STORIES NOT RELATED TO RUGBY TOUR. ACCORDING TO
ACCOUNTS HERE, PRIME MINISTER KIRK SENT LETTER TO TOUR
HOSTS, NEW ZEALAND RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION (NZRFU),
ORDERING IT TO POSTPONE INVITATION TO TOUR NEW ZEALAND UNTIL
SOUTH AFRICAN TEAM CHOSEN ON " GENUINE MERIT SELECTION."
KIRK' S ACTION ENDED MONTHS OF SPECULATION ABOUT FUTURE
OF TOUR WHICH BEGAN AFTER SAG DECIDED NOT TO ALLOW MERIT
(MULTI- RACIAL) SELECTION PROCESS TO ESTABLISH TEAM
MEMBERSHIP.

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2. SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER OF SPORT, DR. PIET KOORNHOF, HAS REACTED ANGRILY, STATING: " WE TAKE IT AMISS THAT IN CANCELLING THE TOUR, MR. KIRK HAS SEEN FIT TO TRY TO TEACH US OUR BUSINESS... WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT HIS CONDEMNATION AND CRITICISM AND INSTRUCTIONS AS TO HOW TO GO ABOUT OUR AFFAIRS." KOORNHOF' S STATEMENT REFLECTS DEFENSIVE ATTITUDE OF MANY SOUTH AFRICANS TOWARD FOREIGN CRITICISM OF POLICIES WHICH ARE VIEWED BY SAG AS PURELY DOMESTIC CONCERN. SAG ALSO CLAIMS POLITICS SHOULD BE KEPT OUT OF SPORT, BUT ITS CRITICS POINT OUT THAT SAG HONORS THIS PRINCIPLE MORE IN THE BREACH THAN IN PRACTICE. ACCORDING TO APRIL 11 CAPE TIMES, OPPOSITION UNITED PARTY SPOKESMAN ON SPORT, J. O. NEWTON THOMPSON, STATED SAG REFUSAL TO ALLOW RUGBY OFFICIALS TO PICK TEAM ON MERIT HAD WRECKED TOUR.

3. NEWSPAPER REPORTS OF VIEWS OF SPORT OFFICIALS AND MAN- ON- THE- STREET SHOW A DIVISION OF OPINION ON POSTPONEMENT. SOME REFLECT KOORNHOF' S CONDEMNATION OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE WHILE OTHERS STATE SAG MUST RELENT AND CHANGE SPORT POLICIES. DR. DANIE CRAVEN, PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY BOARD, EXPRESSED SIAPPPOINTMENT AT POSTPONEMENT AND BELIEF THAT IT WOULD HARDEN ATTITUDES AND MAKE MERIT SELECTION IN FUTURE LESS LIKELY. ON OTHER HAND, PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY UNION (NON- WHITE) SAW POSTPONEMENT AS " A WONDERFUL GESTURE."

4. COMMENT: SERIOUS CONCERN VOICED BY CABINET MINISTER AND EXTENSIVE NEWSPAPER COVERAGE CLEARLY SHOW HOW IMPORTANTLY SOUTH AFRICANS REGARD INTERNATION SPORTING TIES. TOUR POSTPONEMENT POURS SOME COLD WATER ON ELATION RESULTING FROM SUCCESS, IN SAG EYES, OF SOUTH AFRICAN GAMES. CONSEQUENT ANGER COULD, AS DR. CRAVEN NOED, DELAY IMPLEMENTATION OF POSITIVE CHANGES IN SAG' S SPORTS POLICIES. IN LONG- RUN, HOWEVER, REALIZATION THAT FAILURE TO CHANGE POLICIES WILL LEAD TO FURTHER ISOLATION SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE SALUTARY CATALYST. HURD

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